

Heart Defects and Women's Reproductive Health

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Get informed about contraception, preconception health, and pregnancy for people living with heart defects.

A woman's reproductive system is a delicate and complex system in the body. It is important to protect the health of your reproductive system, from menarche through menopause. If you're living with a heart defect, you may need specialized medical care to manage your reproductive health and heart health. Learn more about birth control, preconception health, and pregnancy for women living with heart defects.

Birth Control

[Birth control](#), or contraception, is any method, medicine, or device used to prevent pregnancy. Use of birth control may depend on your desire to have children now or in the future. The type of birth control you use may depend on effectiveness, availability (including accessibility and affordability), and acceptability. Some methods are more effective than others, and no one method is best for everyone.

There is [limited information](#) on the risks of specific birth control methods for women with heart defects. Some people with certain heart defects who are at increased risk of blood clots may be advised to avoid using estrogen-containing contraceptive methods (i.e. combined birth control pills, patch, ring).

Your healthcare provider can help you decide which type of birth control may be best for you now.

Preconception Health

[Preconception health care](#) is medical care before a person becomes pregnant that focuses on increasing the chance of having a healthy pregnancy and healthy baby. Preconception health care is different for every person, depending on their unique needs. For people with heart defects, preconception health care may include assessing overall heart health, determining if any procedures are needed before pregnancy, and discussing the safety of procedures or medications. Based on your individual health, your doctor or healthcare provider will suggest a course of treatment or follow-up care as needed.

Researchers have found that more than [1 in 5 people with a heart defect who became pregnant](#) had not received any of the American Heart Association's [recommended preconception health care](#) in the year before conception. Additionally, almost [1 in 10 women filled prescriptions for cardiac-related medications](#) that may increase the risk of birth defects in the year before they got pregnant.

If you're thinking about having a baby, talk to your healthcare providers about how you can get ready for pregnancy and discuss all medicines you take, including prescriptions, over-the-counter drugs, herbal and dietary supplements, and vitamins.

Pregnancy

Many people with heart defects become pregnant. [Pregnancy can put extra stress on your heart, as your heart is working harder than usual to pump blood to you and your baby.](#) By preparing for pregnancy and following up regularly with your cardiologist (or heart doctor) during pregnancy, most people with a heart defect can safely become pregnant and have a healthy baby.

Compared with women without heart defects, [women with heart defects may have a higher risk for some pregnancy-related issues](#), such as

- Anemia;
- Hemorrhage; or
- High blood pressure.

Compared with non-pregnant women with heart defects, [pregnant women with heart defects had more documented health issues](#), such as

- Diabetes;
- Infectious diseases; or
- Mental health

Researchers have also found that people with heart defects were more likely to [deliver their baby too early](#) (before 37 weeks of pregnancy) compared with people without heart defects. Although rare, people with heart defects may also be [more likely to experience stillbirth](#) than people without heart defects.

With appropriate medical care and treatment, many people with heart defects can have a healthy pregnancy. If you are considering having a baby, talk with your healthcare provider before becoming pregnant to discuss how pregnancy might affect you.